

Message Text

SECRET

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51

ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 061015Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0265

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 6099

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, LA

SUBJECT: SOUVANNA'S SUCCESSOR

1. WITH SOUVANNA LEAVING FOR FRANCE IT IS NOW EVIDENT HE WILL BE OUT OF ACTION FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD, AND DISCUSSION ON THE SUCCESSION IS BEGINNING TO ARISE MORE FREQUENTLY. WHILE DUAL LEADERSHIP BETWEEN TWO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS LEAUM AND PHOUMI SEEMS TO BE GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE FOR THE INTERIM PERIOD, OVER THE LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE THE NAME THAT COMES UP MOST FREQUENTLY IS THAT OF SOUPHANOUVONG.

2. WE EXPECT THAT WE SHALL BE TESTED AS WHETHER U.S. HAS A POSITION ON QUESTION OF A SUCCESSOR TO SOUVANNA AND SPECIFICALLY AS REGARDS SOUPHANOUVONG AS AN ACCEPTABLE CANDIDATE. OUR REACTION ON THIS SUBJECT WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT IMPACT AND I BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD CONSIDER CAREFULLY WHAT IT SHOULD BE.

3. MY RECOMMENDATION IS THAT AT THIS TIME WE SHOULD TAKE A RELATIVELY HARD LINE. WE SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOUPHANOUVONG MAY WELL BE A TRUE NATIONALIST AND A PATRIOTIC LAO. HOWEVER, HIS HISTORY OVER PAST TWENTY YEARS RAISES VERY REAL QUESTION AS REGARDS HIS POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE. THEREFORE, HIS BECOMING PRIME MINISTER IN THE NEAR FUTURE WOULD RAISE SERIOUS QUESTION REGARDING QUALITY OF LAO NEUTRALITY AND WOULD COLOR OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS PGNU. IN THE SHORT TERM A MORE NEUTRAL PER-

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SONALITY PERHAPS ONE OF THE ROYAL FAMILY MIGHT BE THE

BEST CHOICE.

4. IN OUR MIND THIS POSITION HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF
A) REASSURING THE VIENTIANE SIDE AND B) FORCING
SOUPHANOUVONG TO TRIM HIS SAILS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE
HIS CLEAR AMBITION OF LEADING THE GOVERNMENT. TO DO
OTHERWISE AND APPEAR TO FAVOR HIS CANDIDACY WOULD
SEVERELY DEMORALIZE VIENTIANE SIDE WHILE IT WOULD
GAIN US NOTHING WITH SOUPHANOUVONG AND HIS PARTY.
AS DEPARTMENT WILL NOTE, HOWEVER, THE POSITION WOULD
LEAVE OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS EVOLVING TO BECOME
A MORE ACCEPTABLE LEADER. WE SHOULD NOT CLOSE DOOR
ENTIRELY ON HIM SINCE CLEARLY OVER TIME THERE IS NO
OTHER COMPETING LEADER OF HIS STATURE.

5. THIS QUESTION WAS RAISED WITH ME BY SISOUK THIS
MORNING AND PREFACING MY REMARKS WITH THE COMMENT
THAT THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY A LAO AFFAIR, I GAVE HIM THE
FOREGOING ARGUMENT ADDING THAT THE TONE OF PL
PROPAGANDA, THE NON-RELEASE OF EMMET KAY AND THE LACK
OF PROGRESS ON OTHER ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO US
OBVIOUSLY BEAR ON THIS QUESTION.
WHITEHOUSE

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NNN

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